

The Advantages of Employee Wellness Programs

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In the last number of years, there has been a wellness revolution. Many people are beginning to prioritize their physical and mental health, placing greater focus on their choices and the corresponding impact on their overall wellbeing. The wellness industry emphasizes the importance of getting enough sleep, drinking enough water, eating healthy, exercising, and looking after one's mental health.

Popular culture has made health and fitness trendier, bringing it to the forefront of people's minds at all times. Because of this, organizations have recognized the need to implement employee wellness programs to support employees and promote a healthy workplace culture. While many employee wellness programs originally focused solely on physical health, countless companies are now expanding their horizons to include mental health due to the mental health movement.

The wider question then becomes: "what are the benefits of employee wellness programs?" The implementation of employee wellness programs has been positive not only for the employee, but for the organization as a whole. Some of the benefits of employee health and wellness programs include higher levels of productivity, healthier employees, and a reduction in health care costs for the company. Employee wellness programs provide reciprocal benefit for employer and employee and are crucial in ensuring a healthy work environment.

There is evidence that the benefits of an employee wellness program to the organization can include increased work productivity for the company. Studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of employee wellness programs, with one study by Stone (2012) indicating that "they do have significant effects on reducing absenteeism, increase in work productivity, and improved worker morale and loyalty" (p. 73). Employee wellness programs may have a positive

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effect on productivity as those who participate in employee wellness programs tend to be healthier overall. People who are cognisant of their mental and physical wellbeing tend to have more energy, drive, and motivation.

Furthermore, these individuals get injured less often, meaning they are more likely to stay on the job. This conclusion was tested in a United Parcel Service (UPS) study of employee wellness programs. The study concluded that their employee wellness program was responsible for a “decrease in absenteeism, and increase in productivity and morale, and a 60% reduction in on-the-job injuries since the program was first implemented” (Bloom, 2008, p. 41).

Related to the increase in productivity noted by employee wellness programs, the benefits of an employee wellness program to employees include healthier employees overall. As stated by Bloom (2008), “give employees the tools they need to be healthier and they will become healthier” (p. 42). When staff are provided with opportunities for education and physical and mental health tracking, overall wellbeing is more likely to stay top of mind.

While employers roll out employee wellness programs to promote the health and wellbeing of their staff, there are also benefits of an employee wellness program to the organization. Mujtaba and Cavico (2013) led a study on the challenges of corporate wellness programs in the workplace, noting that “a company’s investments in its employees’ health and wellness will “pay off” for the company in the long-run and naturally will benefit the employees, their co-workers, families, communities, and society as a whole” (p. 198). When people lead healthy lifestyles, not only do they benefit but so do those around them. Wellness program employee benefits translate to the wider society, as employees at organizations with employee wellness programs can bring their knowledge and awareness home with them to impact their families and communities.

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Likewise, an organization staffed with healthy employees is productive and positive. Companies can only be successful if they are producing and making a profit. Employees are more likely to support this goal when they are healthy. Simply put, people get more done when they feel physically and emotionally well. Abdullah and Lee (2012) made this connection in a previous study which found “wellness programs have [a] positive impact not only toward employee’s wellbeing but organization wellbeing as well” (p. 483). The benefits of employee wellness programs to employees include a workplace culture that is positively impacted when people are happy and healthy. In this way, emphasizing employee wellness as an integral aspect of a company’s values can be the difference between success and failure.

Whilst employee wellness programs are known to have an impact on the culture of the organization, they can also majorly affect profit margin as well. Before these programs, organizations were paying millions of dollars in avoidable health care costs for employees due to illnesses incurred from lack of knowledge or awareness. Since the implementation of employee wellness programs, many organizations have been able to drastically reduce the money spent on health care each year.

Richardson (2017) noted that “the reduction in health care costs is one of the primary reasons that organizations are investing more in employee health and wellness programs” (p. 3). In this way, the benefits of employee health and wellness programs act as a preventative measure to avoid further expensive health costs for employers and employees. An investment into employee wellness programs can save organizations millions of dollars in the long run.

Costs incurred for offerings such as health education, gym memberships, and nutrition programs are a drop in the bucket compared to expensive health care bills. Johnson & Johnson (J&J) conducted a study on the cost effectiveness of employee wellness programs and found that

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“J&J’s leaders estimate that wellness programs have cumulatively saved the company \$250 million on health care costs over the past decade” (Berry et al., 2010, p. 2).

Wellness in the workplace and beyond has become a major focus for employers in the last number of years. There has become greater demand by employees for a program that emphasizes the importance of physical and mental health and can help staff achieve their health goals. As trends around health and wellbeing are constantly evolving, wellness program employee benefits can help individuals stay up to date with current best practices for overall wellbeing.

Some employee wellness programs focus solely on physical health while others have expanded to include mental health as a major component. Regardless of the details of various employee wellness programs, they provide advantages to both employees and employers alike.

The benefits of employee health and wellness programs are vast and long-lasting. Employee wellness programs generate healthier employees who are conscious about their habits. Wellness program employee benefits include education on appropriate nutrition, mental wellbeing, sleep, and exercise. Moreover, employee wellness programs promote better productivity, as those who are healthy are likely to perform better at work. Healthy staff are motivated, positive, and productive. Finally, improved productivity and healthy employees serve to reduce health care costs for an organization. Investing in health education and habit formation can eliminate or lessen future health problems, saving a company both time and money.

An investment into an employee wellness program is an investment in the future of an organization and its people. Employee wellness programs are a way that companies are keeping up with the times, as the benefits of employee health and wellness programs help organizations demonstrate a genuine concern and appreciation for their employees.

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